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TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR FR LE SY

SUBJECT: FRENCH ON EU BORDER MISSION ON LEBANON AND LEBANON
SPECIAL TRIBUNAL

REF: A. (A) STATE 129199

1B. (B) STATE 128335

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4. (b) and (d).

11. (C) We presented reftel demarches to French MFA DAS-equivalent Ludovic Pouille on September 19. On the EU border mission for Lebanon, Pouille said that France agreed with all of the points as conveyed and made the following additional points:

--Coordination has not been easy on this within the EU, due to the Spanish position in particular, but France is working actively with Spain and Italy to resolve differences to facilitate progress.

--There will be three phases: an &exploratory8 mission sent by Solana's staff to Beirut and Damascus to confirm their readiness to accept the mission and their understanding of its mandate (including acceptance of its operation on both sides of the border), a &preparatory8 mission involving technical experts (including what Pouille called French border and customs officers with personal knowledge of the area) to assess technical needs, and the deployed mission with equipment.

--The timing for the various missions involved is still not decided. Pouille said the exploratory mission should go out shortly but probably not before the end of September (i.e., after the start of the presidential election process in Lebanon and the start of UNGA). The preparatory mission would go out after Ramadan and the Id al-Fitr but possibly not until the end of the year given the expectation that the Lebanese presidential election process would likely play out until November 24 thus spilling into the Christmas/New Year holiday period. The final part, however, should be fully deployed in the first half of 2008 if the rest plays out as it should.

--Speaking frankly, Pouille asserted the final version of the monitoring group, whenever it is constituted, will not be able to do much on the ground to stop the flow of arms or other suspicious goods into Syria. The terrain and the habits for evading detection developed over long years give the advantage to the smugglers. Still, France accepts that something must be done even if it is only symbolic. Training and equipping the Lebanese as well as developing an understanding of the most relevant entry points into Lebanon would be worth something. Pouille accepted as well that, the principle of asserting full sovereignty on Lebanese territory was crucial to our overall efforts on Lebanon's behalf.

--Pouille expressed doubt that a monitoring group might include an Arab component. France expects the EU will make up all the non-local elements of the group.

¶2. (C) On the Special Tribunal, Pouille also expressed France,s full agreement with our points. He was not sure what France,s contribution would be, but it would be commensurate with the importance France ascribes to the Tribunal. The key thing for Paris, however, is waiting for the UNSYG,s appeal.

¶3. (C) Comment: As we were speaking, the French MFA,s Lebanon desk officer brought in first reports of an explosion in East Beirut. When the MFA learned this explosion was the murder of Antoine Ghanem, FM Kouchner issued an immediate condemnation of the killing. We believe the French will respond to this murder with continued firmness, which should positively affect both the EU Border Mission deployment and the Special Tribunal.

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Stapleton